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SUBJECT: TIMOR-LESTE ON BURMA

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¶1. Ambassador on December 1 and 2 spoke with Timor-Leste's president and foreign minister, respectively, to share USG views on Burma as conveyed in reftel. President Ramos-Horta said he highly appreciated and was impressed by recent U.S. overtures to Burma. While he shared our disappointment with the Burmese regime's recent actions, he remained optimistic that the Burmese military eventually will be responsive to U.S. efforts. Based on his contacts with senior Burmese and his reading of Burma's strategic situation, squeezed between India and China, Ramos-Horta believes the Burmese generals are very anxious to improve relations with the U.S. He encouraged the USG not to be overly discouraged by the events in November and predicted the Burmese regime eventually will relent both on ASSK's ability to meet with the NLD party leadership, and the release of political prisoners, albeit at a time more proximate to the planned elections. That said, Ramos-Horta repeated that he strongly believes that Burma must be admonished at the UN for its deplorable human rights record. He recalled with dismay the foreign minister's instructions to the Timorese delegation at the UN to abstain in committee, and reported that he personally told the Timorese permrep to vote with the U.S. in plenary.

¶2. Foreign Minister da Costa also expressed gratitude for the readout of recent U.S.-Burma engagement. Despite our disappointment with Timor-Leste's abstention at the UN, however, he stuck by his conclusion that Timor-Leste must align itself with ASEAN on the UN Burma human rights vote in order to protect its bid to join ASEAN in 2012. He again offered hope that the Burmese regime would use the current situation to liberalize sufficiently to ensure the legitimacy of the 2010 elections. He noted that he would be travelling to Burma to meet his counterpart and other leaders of the regime early in 2010 and asked to be kept apprised of U.S. policy developments.

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